

Message Text

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PAGE 01 THE HA 01448 01 OF 02 201110Z

15

ACTION EUR-08

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5499

INFO AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS PRIORITY

SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

OSAF/IL WASHDC PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 THE HAGUE 1448

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MASS, NL

SUBJ: F-104 REPLACEMENT: DUTCH PLAYBACK ON MARCH 18 BELGIAN-
DUTCH MEETING

REF: BRUSSELS 2389

1. SUMMARY: DURING EXTENDED CONVERSATION WITH DCM
ON MARCH 19 MOD INFORMATION DIRECTOR SLIGTING GAVE
PARALLEL ACCOUNT OF RESULTS OF MARCH 18 MEETING AS
REPORTED REFTEL AND SPECIFICALLY CONFIRMED THAT FONMIN
VAN ELSLANDE DID NOT RPT NOT ARGUE IN FAVOR OF IMMEDIATE
DECISION FOR THE MIRAGE F-1. ON THE CONTRARY, ACCORDING
TO SLIGTING, VAN ELSLANDE TOOK THE POSITION THAT FACTS
AVAILABLE AT THIS TIME MILITATED FOR THE SELECTION OF
THE F-16. HOWEVER, IN DUTCH EYES MOD VANDEN BOEYNANATS
PLAYED THEPREDOMINANT ROLE AND PERSUADED THE MEETING
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PAGE 02 THE HA 01448 01 OF 02 201110Z

TO DEFER A DECISION UNTIL THE GOF WAS CONFRONTED WITH

THE CURRENT COMPUTATIONS STILL FAVORING THE F-16 AND HAD ANOTHER CHANGE TO IMPROVE THE MIRAGE PROPOSAL FURTHER. SLIGTING THOUGHT THAT FOR QUITE DIFFERENT REASONS THE DUTCH AND BELGIAN GOVERNMENTS WOULD FIND IT CONVENIENT TO POSTPONE A FINAL DECISION UNTIL SOME TIME IN APRIL, IF NOT LATER. AS REGARDS THE GON, SLIGTING (A MEMBER OF THE LABOR PARTY AND POLITICAL PROTEGE OF PRIMIN DEN UYL) EFFECTIVELY RULED OUT A DECISION UNTIL AFTER THE APRIL 10-12 LABOR PARTY CONGRESS. SLIGTING CONFIRMED INDICATIONS THAT MOD VREDELING WAS LEANING TOWARD THE F-16, BUT PULLED NO PUNCHES IN SAYING THAT BREDELING WAS STILL IN TROUBLE WITH HIS OWN PARTY AND MIGHT NOT SURVIVE POLITICALLY. END SUMMARY.

2. OVER LUNCH ON MARCH 19 MINISTRY OF DEFENSE INFORMATION DIRECTOR ALBERT SLIGTING (WHO ACCOMPANIED MOD VREDELING ON HIS RECENT VISIT TO WASHINGTON) GAVE A PARALLEL ACCOUNT OF THE MARCH 18 BELGIAN-DUTCH MEETING AS REPORTED REFTEL, SPECIFICALLY CONFIRMING THAT FONMIN VAN ELSLANDE HAD NOT ARGUED IN FAVOR OF AN IMMEDIATE DECISION FOR THE MIRAGE F-1. ON THE CONTRARY, VAN ELSLANDE HAD TAKEN THE POSITION THAT THE FACTS AS PRESENTLY KNOWN MILITATED FOR THE F-16. HOWEVER, ACCORDING TO SLIGTING, VAN ELSLANDE CAME ACROSS AS A SOMEWHAT WEAK FIGURE. THE REAL FORCE ON THE BELGIAN SIDE WAS MOD VANDEN BOEYNANTS. WHEN VANDEN BOEYNANTS WAS CONFRONTED WITH THE AGREED FINDINGS OF THE BELGIAN AND DUTCH DEFENSE EXPERTS THAT PRICE-WISE THE F-16 PROPOSAL WAS STILL SUPERIOR TO THE IMPROVED MIRAGE F-1 OFFER, HE SAID, "I DON'T BELIEVE IT." VAN BOEYNANTS THEN INSISTED THAT THE GOF BE GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO EXAMINE THE AGREED FINDS AND TO COME IN WITH A NEW SUBMISSION. VANDEN BOEYNANTS REPORTEDLY ADDED THAT THE DUTCH AND BELGIANS HAD NOT SEEN THE ULTIMATE FRENCH OFFER, BUT WHEN IT CAME IT WOULD BE IN EFFECT A BLOCK-BUSTER THAT WOULD CHANGE THE WHOLE EQUATION.

3. ACCORDING TO SLIGTING, VANDEN BOEYNANTS' FORCEFUL ADVOCACY MADE SOME IMPRESSION ON THE DUTCH, BUT THE MAIN REASON THE LATTER AGREED TO A FURTHER DELAY WAS CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 THE HA 01448 01 OF 02 201110Z

BECAUSE IT SUITED THEIR DOMESTIC POLITICAL CONVENIENCE. THE MEETING OF THE FOUR CONSORTIUM MODS WAS NOT TENTATIVELY SCHEDULED FOR APRIL 3 AND IT MADE NO SENSE, SLIGTING SAID, FOR THE GON TO EXPRESS ITS FINAL POSITION AT THAT MEETING WHEN THE LABOR PARTY CONGRESS WOULD OPEN ONLY ONE WEEK LATER. SLIGTING'S PERSONAL VIEW WAS THAT ALTHOUGH IT MIGHT NOT NECESSARILY BE TO THE GON'S ADVANTAGE TO ACQUIESCE IN A FURTHER DELAY, THERE WAS NO APPARENT REASON

WHY THE GON SHOULD BE PRESSING FOR AN EARLY DECISION.
MEANWHILE, MODS AND FONMINS OF BELGIUM AND THE NETHERLANDS
WERE PLANNING TO MEET AGAIN FIRST OF NEXT WEEK.

4. SLIGTING INDICATED THAT ONE OF THE REASONS AT LEAST
WHY VREDELING DID NOT WANT TO BITE THE BULLET YET WAS
HIS CONTINUING PROBLEM OF CREDIBILITY WITH HIS OWN
PARTY. SLIGTING EMPHASIZED IN THIS CONNECTION THAT IT
WAS ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL FOR THE US TO GIVE VREDELING
ASAP WRITTEN DOCUMENTATION TO COUNTER THE LEFT WING
ARGUMENTS THAT THE NETHERLANDS DID NOT NEED A REPLACEMENT
AIRCRAFT WITH LIMITED AIR SUPERIORITY AND THAT SUCH AN
AIRCRAFT WOULD ADD NEEDLESSLY AND DANGEROUSLY TO THE
ARMS RACE. DCM REPLIED THAT EMBASSY FULLY UNDERSTOOD
THE SITUATION AND HAD CABLED DEFENSE DEPARTMENT LAST
WEEK FOR THIS INFORMATION. DCM SAID SLIGTING COULD TELL
VREDELING THAT WE WOULD FOLLOW-UP WITH DOD ON AN URGENT
BASIS. SLIGTING THANKED EMBASSY FOR ITS EFFORTS AND
SAID HE FERVENTLY HOPED THIS INFORMATION WOULD BE IN
VREDELING'S HANDS PRIOR TO APRIL 2 WHEN HE WAS SCHEDULED
TO HAVE A CRUCIAL MEETING WITH HIS LABOR PARTY
CRITICS. SLIGTING PARAPHRASED WINSTON CHURCHILL'S
WARTIME PHRASE, "GIVE US THE TOOLS." THE ONLY WAY
VREDELING COULD DISARM THOSE WHO OPPOSE HIM ON THE
F-16, SLIGTING ADDED, WAS TO HAVE WRITTEN AUTHORITATIVE
DOCUMENTATION THAT THE SOVIETS WERE PLANNING TO BUILD
THEIR OWN VERSION OF A LIMITED SUPERIORITY FIGHTER FOR
THE 1980S, AND THAT THE F-16 WAS DESIGNED NOT RPT NOT
AS AN OFFENSIVE WEAPONS SYSTEM BUT RATHER TO PROVIDE
EFFECTIVE GROUND SUPPORT IN A LIMITED OPERATIONAL RADIUS
BUT WITH THE ESSENTIAL CAPACITY TO DEFEND ITSELF
AGAINST HOSTILE AIR ATTACKS.

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PAGE 01 THE HA 01448 02 OF 02 201045Z

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ACTION EUR-08

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 PM-03 INR-05 SP-02 L-01 NSC-05

NSCE-00 CIAE-00 EB-03 PRS-01 ACDA-10 SAJ-01 MC-01

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SECDEF PRIORITY
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AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 THE HAGUE 1448

LIMDIS

5. SLIGTING ENCOURAGED EMBASSY TO CONTINUE ITS CONTACTS WITH DEFENSE STATE SECRETARY STEMERDINK, LABOR PARTY PARLIAMENTARY LEADER VAN THIJN AND OTHER KEY LABOR PARTY FIGURES. WHATEVER THE EMBASSY COULD DISCREETLY DO TO STRENGTHEN VREDELING'S POSITION, VIS-A-VIS HIS OWN PARTY, WOULD BE HELPFUL, SLIGTING SAID, BECAUSE VREDELING WAS STILL IN SERIOUS TROUBLE. HIS CREDIBILITY RATING WAS LOW AND HIS DAYS AS DEFENSE MINISTER MIGHT WELL BE NUMBERED IF HE OPTED FOR THE F-16 WITHOUT HAVING CONVINCED THOSE WHO COUNTED IN HIS PARTY THAT THIS WAS THE RIGHT DECISION. SLIGTING RECALLED THE UNHAPPY EXAMPLE OF FORMER FONMIN DIRK STIKKER (LATER NATO SYG). STIKKER HAD FELT CONSTRAINED TO RESIGN FROM GOVERNMENT BECAUSE THE MAJORITY OF HIS LIBERAL PARTY COLLEAGUES IN THE PARLIAMENT WERE AGAINST HIM ON SOME FACET OF THE WEST NEW GUINEA QUESTION EVEN THOUGH PARLIAMENT AS A WHOLE SUPPORTED HIM. THIS, CONCLUDED SLIGTING, WAS EXACTLY VREDELING'S SITUATION AND HIS DILEMMA.

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PAGE 02 THE HA 01448 02 OF 02 201045Z

6. IN VIEW OF GROWING SENSITIVITY OF GON AND PERHAPS OTHER CONSORTIUM GOVERNMENTS TO INFORMATION ABOUT CONFIDENTIAL DELIBERATIONS ON F-104 REPLACEMENT, IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT ALL ADDRESSEES OF THIS AND SUBSEQUENT TELEGRAMS FROM THE HAGUE BE VERY DISCREET AND AVOID ANY REFERENCE TO DUTCH SOURCES FOR INFORMATION WHICH WE ARE OBTAINING AND REPORTING IN FULL. AS THE GON HAS NOW ENTERED A MORE CRITICAL PHASE OF ITS DECISION-MAKING PROCESS, ANYTHING WHICH ITS AUTHORITIES COULD CONSIDER AS A LEAK MIGHT WELL RESULT IN FREEZING OUR EXCELLENT SOURCES AMONG SENIOR POLITICAL FIGURES AND RNLAFF LEADERS.
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